



COMIC-CON

SAN DIEGO 2015

STACK's back from Comic-Con 2015, and it was every bit as awesome as we expected. There was also a lot we didn't expect, so if you're thinking of heading over to San Diego in 2016, here are some useful tips to help you navigate your way through the world's biggest celebration of pop culture geekdom, and get the most out of four days of fun, summer sunshine and cosplayers. By Scott Hocking

5 things you need to know about COMIC-CON

Comic-Con is huge! With 135,000 badges sold and injecting approx. \$150 million into the San Diego economy, the 4-day event is a massive celebration of pop and geek culture. It's also one big street party. While the focus is the San Diego Convention Centre, there's plenty going on in the surrounding area and the city's historic Gaslamp Quarter. So if you don't have a badge, you can still enjoy the party atmosphere, check out video game events, rides, enjoy a meal and tipple in the many customised cafés and bars, get lots of free stuff (like magazines, buttons and tickets to

movie preview screenings), or simply watch the passing parade of cosplayers. Plus, you never know who you'll run into for a selfie – "Hello Joss Whedon, love your work!" There's also a lot of promotion for upcoming films and TV series going on – *Sharknado 3: Oh Hell No!* was hard to miss, with a horde of persistent sign-waving shark girls weaving through the crowd and urging everyone that it's their patriotic duty to "embrace the Nado", and squads of soldiers in combat gear marching through the streets to raise awareness of new series *Colony*. Better still was the cheeky promotion of new *Omen*-inspired series *Damien*, in the vicinity of a group of unimpressed, placard-wielding evangelists.



Moreover, nearby hotels offered a multitude of events including the Robert A. Heinlein Blood Drive, The Comic-Con International Independent Film Festival (CCI-IFF), an X-Box Lounge and the Her Universe Fashion Show, offering the latest in "Geek Couture". Even the San Diego Central Library got in on the act with a series of educational programs on comic book art and geek culture. Sadly, the annual Zombie Walk was cancelled this year due to an accident in 2014 in which a woman was struck down by a car and seriously injured; the deaf driver reportedly panicked when confronted by the oncoming horde of walking dead.



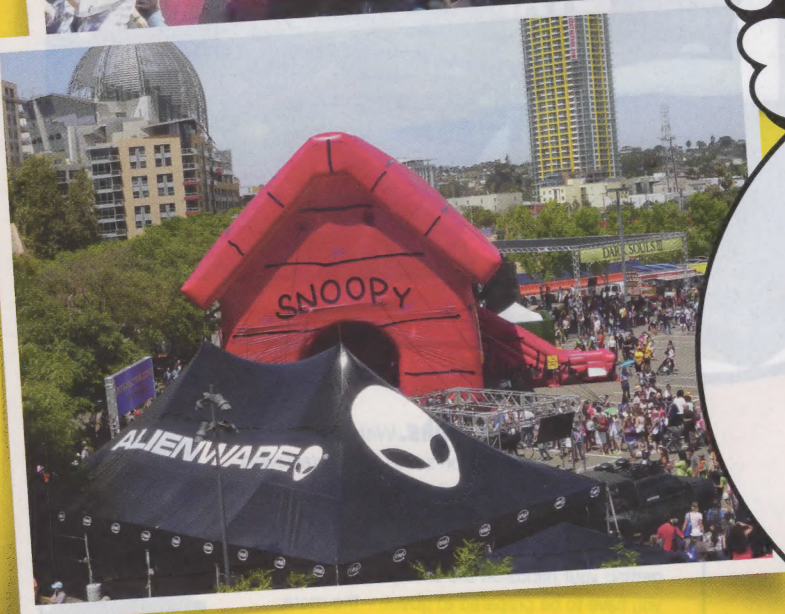


Exclusive merchandise. You could spend a fortune at the merchandise booths located in the Convention Centre's labyrinthine exhibit hall, but there are forces at work that will curtail your purchasing – which is both a good and bad thing. Many come for the Comic-Con Exclusives, those action figures and sets that are only available at the Con and in strictly limited numbers. Which means if you want that exclusive new Stormtrooper figure from *The Force Awakens*, or a 12th Doctor Sonic Screwdriver, it's not as easy as walking up to the Star Wars or Doctor Who booth, slapping down some greenbacks and walking out with one. If you want any of the Comic-Con exclusive merchandise, be prepared to line-up with everyone else who wants it, and even then there's no guarantee you'll get it. Those in line partake in a random lottery system – aka Line Drawings – for a chance to buy, and the drawing procedure usually takes place at an ungodly hour of the morning (6–7am). You draw a ticket and if it's a lucky one, you get to join the queue to purchase. But even then, you're competing against opportunistic eBay entrepreneurs who buy as many as they can to make as much profit as they can online. Organisers have wised up to this, however, and the availability of exclusive merchandise is usually capped at a limit of 1–6 per person for the more popular items. Planning, determination and lots of patience are required to ensure that coveted exclusive is all yours. Buying non-exclusive merchandise can be a challenge, too – our attempts to gain access to the overflowing Funko booth and Doctor Who Store proved unsuccessful on two occasions due to capped lines. Try and get any shopping done during the Preview Night on the Wednesday before the Con kicks off proper.



Panels and autographs. With the hottest new movies and television series being previewed at Comic-Con, attending one of the panels becomes a priority on any attendee's list. All the big ones are held in Hall H, which holds 6,500 people, but like getting your hands on the exclusive merchandise, you have to be prepared to queue – the more popular Hall H panels this year included *Doctor Who* (amazing how popular this is in the States), *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2*, Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight*, and *The Walking Dead*. However, don't think you can rock up an hour prior to the start time and secure a seat. Be prepared to camp out overnight if you're after a spot in Hall H the next day, and if you get one, be prepared to stay in there all day. The hall and the smaller rooms aren't cleared between panels, so if you get a seat, stay there. The downside to this is you may have to endure panels you don't give a rat's about in order to see the ones that you do – past examples include *Game of Thrones* fans having to sit through a *Twilight* panel to get to the Westeros one. But once you're inside H, there's a definite buzz to be had from knowing you're among the first in the world to see that new trailer or exclusive footage. If you don't get into a Hall H panel you can catch up on what you missed in The Playback Room at the Omni San Diego Hotel, albeit sans the exclusive footage and trailers that were screened. Autographs and signings are usually held after the panels and are controlled by a line drawing system (see point 2), plus there is usually a charge for the signature of your favourite hero/villain.





Interactive attractions.

Ever wanted to be menaced by *The Walking Dead* or take on a Deadite with a chainsaw, *Evil Dead* style? Well, you can in the Exhibit Hall, with many booths offering interactive fan experiences you won't soon forget. There's usually a cool souvenir giveaway for participants, too. A lot of these fun (and free) events can also be found at offsite locations, including testing your parkour skills on an *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* obstacle course; visiting Snoopy's house from *The Peanuts Movie*; testing your internal fortitude on the *Scream Queens* ride (which drops you from a great height); and evading VR vampires from *The Strain*, chilling out in an inflatable *Fargo* snow globe, or checking into *American Horror Story: Hotel* at the FX Fearless Arena on the waterfront.

Comic-Con is also about comics. With all the hype and excitement surrounding the premiere of new trailers and footage from the latest superhero and Star Wars films, and panels featuring your favourite movie and TV stars, it's easy to forget that (as the name implies) Comic-Con is also about the illustrated pages from which many of these pop culture and screen icons spring. When you do a lap of the Exhibit Hall – which will probably take a couple of days to see everything properly – make sure you stop in at the Artists' Alley, where you'll find some simply amazing artwork and the talented folk who created it, who are more than happy to chat about their work and technique. Then there is the area where you can buy the latest graphic novels and those elusive and rare back issues to plug the gaps in your comic collection, be it Marvel, DC or Dark Horse. Although make sure you have a fat wallet or credit card with a big limit, especially if you're after a vintage rarity – an early issue of Marvel's *Journey Into Mystery*, featuring the Mighty Thor, can set you back 500 big ones. And that's cheap compared with others on offer!



AND THE WINNER IS...

Kade Pepper from Queensland was the lucky winner of this year's 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment 'Win a Trip to Comic-Con' competition, which required the purchase of any specially stickered Fox TV title from JB Hi-Fi to enter.

"I entered twice," said Kade. "I bought *Family Guy: Season 1* at JB Morayfield and *Firefly* at JB Carseldine. I think it was the first entry that won."

Kade and his mate George were then off to San Diego for five days of Comic-Con madness, including the Preview Night. "The highlight of the event would have to be the unlimited range of comics available that you never see in Australian stores," notes Kade. "Being one inch away from an Action Comics #1 is something you can't do in Australia. Meeting Todd McFarlane was another highlight, as he is my favourite Spiderman artist and the founder of Image Comics."

"As an event, it's just mind blowing," he continues. "The dedication of the fans queuing up for days to get into Hall H was insane, and the generosity of artists giving their time to meet fans is great. We caught the *Family Guy* and *Simpsons* panels, which were great in putting faces to the voice actors."

"It's an exhausting five days and we found ourselves running on adrenaline with minimal sleep, but it's well worth it. Every corner we turned there was something cool to look at."



Todd McFarlane and winner Kade Pepper.

